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ABSTRACT

The school board as a governing body for education is essentially unique to the United States. Other countries in recent years have adopted forms of local citizen participation in school affairs. None of these practices has approached the American School Board in historical significance or contemporary meaning. This paper, prepared for use as a staff inservice training paper in the U.S. Office of Education, traces the historical development of school government in the United States and comments on the contemporary concerns and challenges to school boards. The author discusses the organizational character of school boards, examines decisionmaking behavior, talks about problems and issues regarding local boards, and makes observations about the future. (Author/JF)

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The Dynamics of Local School Control

by

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prepared for

The Committee on Educational Finance

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Preface

This paper was prepared at the request of Dr. Charles Fitzwater of the U.S. Office of Education. It has been written based upon an outline reviewed and approved by Dr. Fitzwater and his colleagues in June, 1973. The paper was prepared for use as a staff inservice training paper and has been shaped to that end.

The school board as a governing body for education is essentially unique to the United States. Other countries in recent years have adopted forms of local citizen participation in school affairs. But none of these has approached the American School Board in historical significance or contemporary meaning.

The authors of this report directed a major study of large city school boards recently supported by the Danforth Foundation. Some of the data and concepts incorporated in the paper were drawn from that research. We wish to express our thanks to the Foundation for its support of our previous work and especially for that portion reflected in this manuscript.

The Dynamics of Local School Control

The purpose of this essay is to clarify the ideology of local control and to discuss the form in which it is now practiced. Implicit in this purpose is the need to discuss those forces which infringe upon local decision-making prerogatives. In addition to its obvious geographic referrent, the concept of local control carries with it the notion that laymen, not professionals, should make policy decisions for the schools. The vehicle for doing so is the local board of education, a purely American form of government, which will be the focal point for our discussion.

Nearly fifteen years ago, Roald F. Campbell authored a widely quoted article entitled "The Folklore of Local School Control."[1] He asserted that the long-revered concept of local control had been overemphasized and that, as a matter of fact, state and federal influences had always had great impact upon local schools. Noting these conditions, he called for a more "realistic" view of these relationships and "the forging of an honest local-state-federal partnership." Subsequent events have extended federal and state influences upon local district decision making. The question of who does and should participate in local decisions continues to provoke debate but the ideology of local control remains so strong that few persons challenge it openly and no one seeking public office would dare campaign against it.

There are 16,515 boards of education in the United States today.[2] The approximately 99,000 persons who serve as board members constitute the largest group of public officials in the country. They are generally thought to be among the most selfless and public service minded of such officials. The ideal for school board behavior was stated several years ago by Edwin Tuttle, the first executive secretary of the National School Boards Association.

> ...a non-partisan, broadly representative team spirited board of education, having clearly defined policies based on a thorough understanding of the educational process, conducting its business in open sessions as a committee of the whole, and possessing fiscal independence for the operation of its educational programs under the administration of a chief school officer.
>
> The responsibility of the board of education towards its community is not only legal, but has civic, social, economic, and moral aspects which are no less important.
>
> With the greatest good to the greatest number as its goals, the board should seek at all times to carry out the considered wishes of the majority of the people of the community within the framework of the law, whatever that may be."[3]

These paragraphs contain the main theme of school board philosophy and also an important irony. Many board members have internalized the implicit as well as explicit values that this pattern of thinking reflects. The emphasis on "majority wish" has provided an innocent rationale for those who believe that the public interest can best be served by focusing on the greatest good for the greatest number and simultaneously served as a cloak for those who deliberately have wanted to avoid responding to minority needs and interests.

The conditions which Tuttle described have important historical precedents which continue to shape American thinking regarding boards of education. The origins of lay control of education in America are embedded in the early history of the colonies. There is little evidence that the founding fathers of the New England towns possessed gifted political insights or philosophical sensitivities that caused them to establish school committees and eventually school districts.[4] School committees (the forerunner to school boards) were a response to the growing burden of government thrust upon the selectmen, the forerunners of today's city councilmen.

Selectmen were part time officials struggling for survival in primitive surroundings; they hardly had time to manage the affairs of the town let alone

run the schools. It was a sensible move for selectmen to create school committees, endow them with some authority, and encourage them to be about the business of supervising local schools. Much had to be done; education was important. The tasks of governance had to be shared among a larger group of citizens. In fact similar conditions subsequently led to the establishment of the superintendency--too much work, need for special knowledge, rapid increase in enrollments, and growing recognition of the importance of education to an industrialized society.[5]

The appearance of school committees was first noted in the eighteenth century. Selectmen began assigning responsibility for certain school affairs to special groups. Early school committees were of several kinds: special purpose, temporary, term, elected, appointed, large and small. Special school committees were assigned a variety of tasks by selectmen such as visiting schools, selecting teachers and headmasters, providing school housing, and certifying teachers. As characterizes most acts of delegation, selectmen were often reluctant to relinquish complete responsibility to school committees even though burdened with the affairs of general government. Consequently there developed some misgivings about school committees among selectmen. In 1826 however the Massachusetts General Court gave to every town a school committee as a definite body for the care of schools, leaving little for selectmen or town meetings to do in regard to schooling.

The impact of the church on the development of the public educational system is well documented in the history of American education. Local ministers often were prominent members of school committees and were designated special responsibilities because of their office and stature in the community. For example, the approval of grammar school masters was placed directly in the hands of ministers in Massachusetts by law in 1701. The first explicit state

level authorization in Massachusetts for a school committee occurred in 1822 for the city of Boston. And, as indicated above, four years later a general Massachusetts law was enacted requiring such school committees for each town.[6] Thus the state legitimized practices that were already spreading in communities.

Prior to the General Court authorization for the Boston School Committee it had approved special purpose committees for "districts."[7] The school district became a new unit of local school government (distinct from the towns) designed initially to provide schools for rural areas. The Massachusetts Act of 1789 granted legal rights to school districts similar in some respects to those granted earlier to towns. School districts could levy a tax for the support of schools, a privilege previously granted exclusively to the towns. Horace Mann opposed the legislation advancing the argument used by contemporary opponents of community control--the demonstrated inability as well as unwillingness of very small units to provide adequate schools.[8]

The unique character of school governance developed and was honored in two ways: (1) through the designation of a distinct group of laymen (the school committee) to look after school affairs; and (2) through the description of particular geographical areas for which a special school government was to exist, the school district.

Schools over two centuries became complicated enterprises--their functions, numbers, and levels were expanded. They eventually outstripped the supervisory capacity of the town meeting, they soon surpassed the governance ability of the selectmen; and they quickly engaged the attention and energies of the school committees once they were created. The growth of local school government was a rather natural, evolutionary process in the New England area. School committees became governing bodies, and school districts became units of govern-

ment in the territories and states of the expanding nation during the nineteenth century. In fact the total structure of educational government which evolved in New England was imitated in many sections of the country.

Michigan, for example, enacted legislation in 1842 establishing the Detroit school district. The Act, patterned after Massachusetts legislation, called for a board of education to direct and regulate all schools within the Detroit district. Twelve school inspectors were chosen, two from each of the six wards of the city. The inspectors, plus the mayor and recorder of the city of Detroit were the "board of education." The mayor was designated in the law to serve as president. A clerk was also appointed to record the work of the board and the city treasurer was to serve as district treasurer unless the school board decided otherwise.[9] The first school legislation in Minnesota (1849) called for establishing school districts with three trustees and a clerk as the governing body. The trustees had the authority to examine and hire teachers. The law was quite specific on personnel. No one was to be employed who was not first examined and found qualified in moral character and ability to instruct in the required branches. The clerk was to collect special taxes, furnish the County Commissioners a list of all persons between four and twenty-one years of age, and report the number of months school had been taught during the year by a qualified teacher.[10] The first Kansas-Nebraska Territorial Legislature passed a law (March 16, 1855) providing for a system of public schools organized as school districts. Although the New England pattern proved to be attractive in most sections of the country, there were some exceptions. County units developed in the South and a few western states such as Utah and Nevada.[11] By and large, however, the structuring of state and local authority which evolved in New England (especially Massachusetts) was eventually adopted in most other states.

The School Board Ideology

The ideology of local school governance has remained fairly stable since the early days of school committees. The dominant credo is that a group of laymen, chosen in a manner compatible with local interest and state mandate, is responsible for local educational control. The theory is that laymen can best represent the public interest in this institutional sector. Historically there has been reluctance to relinquish the formulation of educational policy to professionals. Even after the appointment of superintendents school boards have often implicitly and explicitly tried to retain executive responsibilities.[12]

The school board ideology permeates the language used to describe school boards and school board service. The guides prepared for orienting school board members to their responsibilities, the literature of educational administration, the books on school boards, the hundreds of field studies of school district problems fairly drip with ideological sentimentality: School boards should be populated with good people, intelligent people, in fact the best people. They should be community leaders, civic oriented, compassionate, understanding--persons dedicated to children. Boards must stay out of politics, are best if they are small, elected at large, and allow the administrators and teachers to run the schools. It is sinful for board members to cross the policy line into the arena of administration. In fact, administrators are to resist forcefully all board encroachments on the sanctity of their domains. And similarly boards are to protect their preserves--the enactment of wise and insightful local educational policy.

The doctrines of school government are worth examining in some detail.[13] It is important for laymen and professionals to be explicit about them for there is growing tension between traditional beliefs and emerging points of view.

Critics of education who know the doctrines usually assault them directly. Those who are less aware of their existence or significance impact upon them indirectly. In this section, we deal with the principal features of the local control ideology. Later in the paper we will discuss forces that are challenging these conventional doctrines.

Education is Apolitical and Non-partisan

The case for a special government for educational purposes has rested on the premise that educational issues should not be decided in the normal political arenas. The ideology holds that: educational problems ought to be treated as if they were without political significance and that board members are not to be influenced by or concerned with political considerations. The society will be stronger if its educational welfare can be placed in the hands of small, select groups of laymen who will give intelligent and dispassionate attention to the problems of schooling. Board members are to work within the boundaries of law and precedent which shields them from the nastiness of politics. With such insularity, they can examine thoughtfully those local educational matters over which they have discretion.

Akin to the special government argument has been the endorsement of non-partisanship. School elections, including most at the state level, are generally non-partisan. Political parties have tended to respect the apolitical mythology too. In most locales, parties do not openly endorse candidates in school board elections.

Mayors and other city officials have generally avoided overt identification with school issues through the years. Recent years have seen notable exceptions to this in several major cities. However, a recent survey of attitudes of mayors toward educational issues indicated considerable reluctance on the part of some to become involved in school problems.[14] Mayors, already

battle weary, are not looking for new booby-trapped issues. The recognize the hazards of the educational vineyard and are quite willing to allow boards of education to muddle through alone, especially in uncertain times. Other mayors, however, are appalled at the conditions of the public schools and are quite willing to plunge in and join forces with those that would improve them.[15]

The Nonconflict Value and Press for Consensus

Closely associated with the apolitical doctrine has been the belief in the suppression of conflict. The educational enterprise, according to the ideology, should epitomize orderliness, rationality, and dispassion. It should avoid controversy, find ways to work things out quietly and carefully. Harmony is valued; tension is not. School boards have often interpreted restlessness and controversy within the schools as a sign of professional failure. Where disagreements exist among school officials (board members and/or administrators), the credo holds that these should be argued out privately, not in public.

The other side of the nonconflict value is the desire for solidarity, unity, and consensus. There is in many situations an incredible push for agreement. Superintendents frequently boast about the unanimous votes of their boards. They prize harmony among board members and between themselves and their boards. The roots of consensual behavior are embedded deeply in American educational history. Earlier we described the town meeting as the original vehicle for school governance; its responsibility even included day-to-day supervision as primitive and clumsy as that had to be. The spirit of persons rallying to achieve community purposes has carried through the years. The pioneer experience with house raisings, husking bees, and quilting parties is part of the communal ethos.

A decade ago in observing a small district board the press for consensus was noted forcefully exerting itself upon board members' behavior. This was in the face of rather deep-seated coalitions within the board. The prospect of displaying publicly different points of view is unnerving. School officials, like most other citizens, read weakness into discord; they see strength in solidarity.

Many boards strive desperately for consensus. Items that are divisive are frequently tabled or postponed. Severe problems often cause boards to meet informally or hold lengthy pre-meeting telephone discussions. The purpose of these is to iron out points of difference, to bargain among themselves if necessary, and to protect the public image of tranquility.

The Elitist Syndrome

The language used to describe school board members, their responsibilities and functions, is often elitist. The traditional literature contains phrases like "the best people" should be elected. Board membership is a "sacred trust." Persons must be "public spirited," "intelligent," "compassionate," and "understanding." They must be "dedicated" and serve as "statesmen." We only want "good" people on our boards. Historically this has meant that boards in many school districts were dominated by white, middle class, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant types.

The origins of such sentiments reach back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries--to the early selectmen and school committees. Ministers and doctors were usually well represented in colonial times. Later large numbers of businessmen and other professionals served too. Lower class representation was infrequent and remains so today. Rural boards often have farmers but these are normally the successful, prosperous land owners, not the sharecroppers or renters.

The elitist nature of boards is protected in many districts, whether board members are elected or appointed, through interesting networks of recruitment. Many potential board members become visible through PTA leadership or participation in citizen committees. When vacancies occur on boards they are often filled through appointment from the PTA and citizen committee reservoir. After filling partial terms candidates usually run stronger as incumbents in subsequent elections and are frequently elected. Thus they join the ranks and later participate in similar recruitment practices themselves. There is a strong drive for self-perpetuation within many boards which is supported by the elitist ethic and the separatist nature of educational government.

A Sheltered Public Monopoly

Public school doctrine is rather simple and straightforward. Every child is entitled to a free public education. More than that he is required to attend school between ages specified in the statutes of the several states. He has some freedom of choice. That is, he can elect to attend nonpublic schools under circumstances determined state by state and in conformity with the Constitution of the United States. But it is expected that young people will attend and schools are to be provided for their enrollment.

Carlson labeled the public schools as domesticated enterprises.[16] As such schools are not compelled to attend to all of the ordinary and usual client needs in the manner of other organizations. Public schools do not compete forcefully with other organizations for clients; in fact, a steady flow of students is assured. Thus the usual struggle for survival is eliminated. Like domesticated animals, public school organizations are to be fed and cared for. It is in the law. Moreover, the availability of their supporting resources is not closely tied to quality of performance. Despite

annual battles to increase the flow of resources to schools, the largest portions of school support, like "Ol Man River," just keep flowing along.

The Professional Mystique

Francis Keppel, when United States Commissioner of Education, said that "education was much too important to be left to the educators." His admonition was in part a recognition of the power of the educational establishment, especially school administrators, in shaping education's destiny. Analysts from the professional education community have either been so close to this phenomenon that they have been unable to detect the effects of a growing professionalism or they have been unwilling to acknowledge its presence.

The special nature of educational government has been nurtured, perpetuated, refined, and sheltered essentially by insiders--administrators and teachers--and accepted by and large by school board members and the public. Its norms have evolved slowly. They were the product of a curious admixture of personal, professional, and social interests of persons who labored in the schools. Those norms have been reinforced by the several constituencies of the schools whom the insiders have been able to influence. Many laymen came to believe that society's interests could best be served if public schools were shielded from the idiosyncracies of general government's political systems. Thus the ideology grew and was reinforced by traditions and behavior patterns that were not specified in the law but had the effect of law. There are extensive sets of formal and informal rules, regulations, traditions, precedents, simple "ways of doing things" that are in turn reinforced by beliefs, attitudes, and values. The ideology is strengthened by compulsory education and the in loco parentis doctrine which give the system strong legal powers plus psychological advantage in conducting its affairs.

Purposes and Functions of Boards

Most individuals who think of school boards at all consider board members to be essentially local officials. They are either elected or appointed locally (with very few exceptions), they deal with essentially local problems, they are known (to the extent that they have visibility) primarily as persons working in the local public interest. Practically this is the case. Legally, however, it is not the case. School board members are not local officials--they are "agents of the state" serving at the will and pleasure of state governments.

There are many ways to categorize the purposes and functions of school boards. The most general is that implied above: boards are the instruments responsible for achieving the purposes of education as defined by the states. To fulfill that general mandate there are more detailed responsibilities specified in the Constitutions of the States, delegated specifically by their legislatures, or reasonably implied therefrom. The State Constitutions, the Codes of the several states, the decisions of state and federal courts, the opinions of attorneys general constitute an impressive set of obligations, constraints, and discretionary options for boards.

It is also useful to think of the functions of boards in other than legal terms. Board members are most often described as policy makers. This function has probably been over romanticized since it pervades the ideology. It is clear that policy making has received considerable attention by laymen and professional schoolmen alike but other functions are important too. We will examine several including policy making.

Policy Making

This is the most traditional, best known, time honored function of boards. It squares with the ideology, is lofty, and bestows respect and

dignity over those who are chosen to take part. Most laymen, and professionals for that matter, proceed as if there is general, mutual understanding of what policy making is. The facts are that it is not well understood by scholars or practitioners, even though considerable emphasis has been placed on its investigation.[17]

The processes of policy making may have been clearer in the pre 1960 history of American school boards, especially in suburban, small town, and rural districts. Board meetings in most cases were peaceful, and attracted few visitors, no violence, modest press coverage and much social exchange. The process appeared more rational when conflict and stress were reduced. Policy making conformed with the ideology. The board defined problems, searched for ways of solving them in concert with administrators, selected a solution, and instructed the administrative staff to carry out its mandate.

Rather primitive research a decade ago (conducted in pastoral surroundings) revealed that boards made many decisions only a few of which were actually policy in the sense of establishing directions for future actions.[18] There were some actions which were essentially housekeeping, others that were administrative in compliance with legal obligations, and the remainder, about 10 percent, qualified as genuine acts of policy formation.

Mediation

The late 1960's was a time of escalating demand for educational services across the nation. In fact, the term "demand" became commonplace in the language of education. New emphases were placed upon the quality of education as well as equity in its distribution. Boards of education received demands from their constituencies unparalleled in magnitude and intensity. The first were from blacks supported by white liberals; the second were reactions from whites, partially backlash; and the third were from Spanish-American and

American Indians as well as renewed pressures from blacks. Simultaneously there were demands from teachers and students. Boards often found themselves inundated and unable to respond. Resources were scarce, programs were often weak, the bureaucracies resistant to change. Boards became mediators, or brokers of competing and conflicting interests.

Some observers have described boards as generally resistant to outside pressures, especially those from minority groups, less so to those from their white, middle class friends. Lyke documents the reactions of two medium sized city boards (labeled Alpha and Beta) to pressures from community action organizations. He noted that the nonresponsiveness of board members was due to three things: they perceived such demands as irrelevant; they assumed that they, as boards, had only a limited task and influence; and they believed that community action organizations were irresponsible and illegitimate.[19]

The Alpha and Beta boards were mediating demands from community action organizations. In effect, those board members measured the pressure from advocacy groups against their perceptions of the white middle class backlash, if they were to have acted upon those demands. It is worth noting that the Alpha and Beta boards reacted the same despite quite different compositions and methods of selection. The Alpha board was all Republican, with one Negro member, and elected. Beta was an appointed board, had Republicans and Democrats, and one Negro member. The cities too were dissimilar in many respects.[20]

Responding to constituencies--vocal, hostile, aggressive, threatening--was a new experience for board members and administrators in the 1960's. In early confrontations with individuals and groups, school officials were frequently left shaken and dismayed. The personal and professional integrity of board members was assaulted. Marches, boycotts, packed galleries, threatening

phone calls, poison pen letters, became commonplace. Consequently, such tactics lost their effects in many locales. Board members came to expect the rhetoric and were sometimes disappointed when it was absent.

Leadership

References to school board leadership are prominent in educational folklore. Leadership has become a generalized expectation and to some extent overly romanticized. It harmonizes with the rather universal expectation that those in officialdom will somehow stand above the crowd, possess attributes beyond the ordinary, and utilize those qualities in the pursuit of the common good. Bestowing such distinction (and expectation) on public servants is not new. Thucydides in his funeral speech for Pericles observed "...when a citizen is in any way distinguished, he is proferred to the public service, not as a matter of privilege, but as a reward of merits."

Interpretations of the leadership function take many forms obviously. Some expect board members to lead in purely local educational affairs. Others believe that they should seize the guidon and surge forward seeking educational improvements through state and national channels. With the overdue emergence of civil rights issues, board members are expected by minorities to articulate, advance, and defend policies which represent minority group interests in the schools.

Those who have written about boards have often called upon board members to uphold and extend the conventional ideology. Tuttle, for example, urged board members to be exemplars.[21] They were to reflect belief in public education, devotion to the public interest, faith in the people, and statesmanship. He was evangelistic, invoking loyalty to a cause--the cause of public education in a free society. Others too, who hold deep beliefs in a democratic society, have appealed to board members on similar grounds. The guide for

school board members in California illustrates how the significance of this type of public service has been enshrined: "Yours is a position of trust, since they (citizens of the community) have asked you to direct the public education of their children.... Hence, yours is an impressive responsibility."[22]

Legitimation

The operation of schools in most situations is primarily in the hands of professionals. This is as it must be. In fact, the impact of laymen on the day-to-day life of schools is hard to locate.[23] The bureaucratic structures and the professionals who run them are often insular, self-protective, and able to resist most external influences (including the actions of boards and chief administrators) if they choose to do so.

As education has become more complex, the capacity of laymen to appraise professionals has been reduced. Even the historical responsibility of attesting to the morality and general character of employees at the time of employment has been usurped by certification agencies. As a consequence some of the responsibilities of boards have changed; they have become less initiatory, and to some extent more remote from educational affairs--almost to the point of legitimizing educational matters symbolically.

Thus a major function of boards has been to endorse either the recommendations or the actions of professional personnel. Most educational decisions that boards make are advanced by professionals. As a consequence the work of the boards has become the review and appraisal of proposals for action. They are legitimizers. They stand between the public (parents, students, citizens) which consumes institutional services and the professionals (teachers, administrators, counselors) who deliver services. It would be an error to underestimate the importance of this function. While administrators hold the initiative in proposing board actions, the knowledge that board support must

be obtained for their proposals often influences the nature of what administrators propose.

Ceremonial

Ceremonial and ritualistic responsibilities are a part of board members lives too. In many districts, board members appear at public functions especially those related to the schools. They give Commencement talks and speak to PTA's, Chambers of Commerce, tax groups, civil rights organizations, teachers and other board members.

Within sophisticated segments of American society there are pressures to downgrade or ignore the importance of ritual. But for others for whom economic and social mobility are still valued and where achievements and their recognition are still prized by large numbers, ceremony remains significant. Many board members have gained and continue to receive satisfactions from ceremony. Indeed in many instances these are about the only rewards from this tough but important public service.

The Organizational Character of School Boards

Boards of education vary in size and the means by which they are selected. Most boards have five to seven members although a few have as many as twelve to seventeen. Perhaps more significant than the range in absolute size of boards is the variation in the size of the constituencies they represent. Contrast, for example, the per capita constituency responsibilities of the seven member board in Los Angeles with those of a seven member board in a community of 5,000 persons. It is reasonable to expect that a larger proportion of the population in the smaller community actually knows and feels close to a board member than in Los Angeles.

A related question of interest is whether different kinds of communities

have boards which are characterized by different types of behavior. Very few studies have been directed to this question. However, there is support for some generalizations. In the most comprehensive survey of boards to date, White[24] found that nearly 86 percent of all board members were elected. Those who were appointed, however, tended to be found in districts which enrolled more than 25,000 pupils and/or Southern states. In a comparative study of eight Northern City School boards, Crain[25] concluded that appointed boards were likely to be more liberal in their views toward race issues and less inclined to respond to citizen pressure than elected boards. Our own observations suggest that elected city board members tend to be more aggressive campaigners and more determined to establish public identity than their counterparts who seek election in smaller districts. The task is not an easy one, however. While an occasional Louise Day Hicks will become widely known, most board of education members in cities as well as smaller districts are relatively obscure public figures.

There is some evidence that school board behavior is linked to the broader community context. In a recent study of school desegregation behavior in 91 Northern cities, Kirby, et. al.,[26] found that boards of education were most likely to respond to desegregation issues when (1) the mayor was active regarding the issue, (2) there was unity in the local civil rights movement, and (3) there were a number of black elected officials in the city. Positive action to desegregate was most likely when (1) the mayor was active, (2) there was conflict on the board, (3) the civic elite supported desegregation, and (4) the superintendent acted positively. Moreover, action was most likely where State departments had acted to require desegregation.

McCarty and Ramsey[27] examined the relationship between community power structure and school board decision-making practices in fifty-one school

districts. They concluded that school boards in communities dominated by a single elite were themselves dominated by that elite. In districts where two or more factions competed for control, this factionalism was reflected on the board. In districts which were characterized as pluralistic, board members were characterized as "a community of peers whose decisions are characterized by full discussion of problems and arrival at consensus in an atmosphere of detachment from the interests of any particular segment of the community." Finally, in districts where the power structure is "inert" boards of education were found to do little but sanction the initiatives of the superintendent. (It is worth noting that the McCarty and Ramsey data were collected in the early 1960's prior to the tensions that marked many school districts later.)

Minar and Boyd examined the behavior of school boards in suburbs. Minar[28] concluded that conflict regarding school affairs would more likely be found in communities of lower socioeconomic status. He attributed this to the likelihood that board members in such districts were less likely to defer to the expertise of the superintendent than their higher status counterparts who had further developed organizational and management skills and attitudes. In a subsequent study, Boyd[29] found support for Minar's position but argued that a more significant explanation could rest in cultural variations among districts. His conclusion was that there was greater tolerance for (perhaps even hopes for) conflict and "private regarding" as opposed to "public regarding"[30] values in some school districts than others. He found, for example, that conflict about schools was welcomed as a diversion from other concerns in some locales.

The general finding that school board behavior is linked to contextual political variables is not surprising. Specificity about the nature of that relationship is more elusive. However, sufficient evidence is available to

support that boards behave differently depending upon the nature of state requirements, the structure of community politics including the level of conflict-mediating skills which are present, community ideology and perhaps the means by which the board is selected.

Board members are selected by various means. As noted earlier, most are elected. However, there is considerable variation in election practices. In many communities, candidates run unopposed and are often drafted for the race by board incumbents or other persons close to the system. In contrast, some elections are hotly contested over personalities and/or issues. A fact for contemplation in this regard is the finding by Walden that defeat of an incumbent board member generally triggers a process which ultimately leads to the dismissal of the superintendent.[31]

It is interesting to note who backs candidates in the case of contested elections. Candidates are frequently linked to taxpayer groups or those associated with ideological issues such as sex education or religious instruction. In some districts the local PTA is a force in advancing candidates. More intriguing because of the challenge it poses to the lay aspect of local control is the practice of school employees supporting board candidates. A recent study of five major cities[32] found that teachers, administrators, and in some cases school custodians provided financial and other kinds of backing for board of education candidates. There are indications that teacher associations, in particular, have a growing interest in and capability of influencing the outcome of school board elections.

Board of education members who are appointed receive their appointments in a variety of ways. The appointing agent may be the mayor, the city council, the county commissioners, the governor of the state, or court officers. In some instances, the appointing agent is required or at least expected to make

his appointments from a list of potential candidates developed by a "blue ribbon" screening committee. One elaborate procedure of this type exists in Chicago where a screening committee comprised of representatives from designated community groups recommends candidates for appointment by the mayor. Often when board members are appointed, care is taken to see that various interest and community groups have their "representative" on the board. For example, it is taken for granted in Chicago that trade unions, industrial unions, the downtown business community, real estate interests, the PTA, the Black community and the Polish community will all have representatives on the eleven memter board of education.

A body similar to the blue ribbon panel in Chicago is the nominating caucus which exists in some areas, particularly suburban districts. In some few instances, the caucuses are held by local political parties for the purpose of advancing candidates for election. As noted earlier, however, partisanship in school board elections is quite rare. More frequently, the caucus exists as a means of getting representatives of community interests to agree upon the "best" candidates. It is an endorsement procedure often off the record. The informal expectation is that announcement of caucus-supported candidates will deter others from entering the race, thereby reducing the possibility of electoral conflict regarding school matters. Study of the caucus system in the Chicago area found that caucus-supported candidates usually were elected and that the caucus would sometimes prevail upon persons to seek election who would not have been candidates otherwise.[33]

Several sources have noted that boards of education are comprised primarily of upper middle class white males. While it is not uncommon for boards to have one or two women members, it is an unusual board on which women comprise the majority. Most board members are businessmen or professionals,

a fact which led George Counts to question the representativeness of school boards more than fifty years ago.[34]

New patterns of membership including sex distribution appear to be developing in large cities. More women, more minorities, more socioeconomic heterogeneity, and greater breadth of perspective are there. In Detroit where eight regional boards have been created the balance in membership between men and women is almost even. The central board of education in Detroit has seven blacks and six whites, seven men and six women. The regional boards have large numbers of women but less than fifty percent. Recent ethnic developments within the Polish community have developed strong new senses of identity. As a consequence there are three Polish members on the central board in Detroit.

Contrary to the ideology, not all board members seek the office for purely altruistic reasons. While we know of no recent study, efforts a decade ago by McCarty[35] and Gross[36] determined that many board members sought office for personal reasons such as gaining prestige, pressing for special interests, or as a springboard to higher office. More recently, Cronin[37] has suggested five types of board members according to their orientation and motivation. They are: (1) the client oriented member who sees himself primarily as an advocate for children, (2) the guardian whose emphasis is upon representing the interests of tax-conscious citizens, (3) the benefactor who views school employees as his primary constituency, (4) the politico who views membership as a step to another public office, and (5) the maverick who seeks office to advance a special interest, be it phonics or football. The orientation and motives of board members is an important subject for contemporary study. To the extent that boards can and do determine directions for school systems, their motives are influential determinants.

Board membership has been defined traditionally as part-time community

service rather than full-time employment. Most boards meet in formal session once or twice per month. While all official business must be transacted in these sessions, most boards convene between meetings for private study sessions, committee of the whole meetings, or, where the law provides, executive sessions. Board members are often asked to participate in various social and ceremonial functions. Moreover, the well-informed boardman will devote substantial time to reading and studying about the schools. All in all, it is not uncommon for school board members to devote upwards of fifteen to twenty hours per week to school affairs.

Most school board members serve without compensation. The exceptions to this are rare. Those board members who are compensated generally receive no more than a token amount (e.g. $20) per meeting. An interesting exception is Los Angeles where board members are paid $75 per meeting for a maximum of ten meetings per month (the board in Los Angeles meets at least ten times per month). The time demands upon and absence of compensation for board members limits the pool of persons from whom board members can be selected. In general, a prospective board member must be a person who can contribute substantial amounts of time without compensation. Acknowledgement of this fact coupled with the growing complexity of school affairs has prompted recent proposals that board membership be reconstituted as full-time and compensated service.

The Context of Decision-Making

The ideology of local control contributes to misunderstanding of the school board's decision-making role. Whereas many persons believe local boards make all important decisions regarding the school, the actual situation is otherwise. School boards are, in fact, administrative agencies of the state with only certain delegated policy-making prerogatives. Goldhammer

has summarized this position as follows:

> As a duly elected or appointed body, the school board operates solely as an agency of the state and derives its power primarily from statutory law. Constitutional and statutory provisions define the degree and the range of the power of the board. Some states provide for very specific enumeration of limited board powers and others for very broad and general powers, with a large degree of variation between these two extremes in most of the fifty states.[38]

School board decision-making latitude is formally delimited in each state by constitutional provisions, statutory law, rules and regulations of the state board of education and decisions of the courts.[39] Conversely, these same sources provide the bases for school board authority. Boards of education possess authority in particular areas to the extent that such authority is expressly stated or implied in the constitution, statutes, board rules and regulations, and judicial decisions of a state.

The nature of school board authority has been a frequent subject of litigation.[40] Several general principles have emerged from such litigation. The first and most fundamental has been stated above: School boards are agents of the state and possess only those powers specifically delegated or implied to them by the state. Second, boards must comply with the ministerial aspects of state statutes and rules. Third, boards may not delegate the discretionary authority provided them. Thus, for example, a recent Ohio case held that boards could not submit contract disputes with teachers to binding arbitration.[41] The authority of school boards has been frequently litigated in cases where plaintiffs claim that school board actions were without justification or in conflict with existing constitutional or statutory provisions.

It is difficult to be precise about the areas in which boards of education enjoy discretionary authority because this varies from state to

state. Among the most important areas in which school boards generally exercise some discretion are the employment and dismissal of personnel including the superintendent which often becomes a board's most celebrated action, the establishment of a budget, and the determination of courses of study and approval of capital outlays. Yet such decisions are usually made within a context of state certification requirements for employees, state school finance provisions, and mandated courses of study. As noted earlier most school board decisions are not policy decisions but ceremonial, housekeeping, or administrative details taken to comply with their ministerial responsibilities to the state.

In addition to the statutory parameters established by state codes and regulations, boards of education are confronted with other important constraints upon their decision-making latitude. Not the least of these is their part-time status. Many educational policy matters are incredibly complex. For example, questions about whether and how school districts should act upon defacto segregation, offer alternative school programs, or establish performance-based objectives for staff members have produced volumes of scholarly debate. It is probably unrealistic to expect board of education members to be very knowledgeable about the pros and cons of such subjects. Moreover, board members generally recognize that their knowledge base is limited. As a consequence, they typically rely upon the advice of the administration in such areas.[42] As an alternative they may do their best to avoid considering such issues and spend their time instead in discussing more mundane items such as the size of the district telephone bill or the color to paint the nalls of the high school.

A second force constraining school board decision-making and one which appears to be growing in import is the action of the courts. The past decade has witnessed a great deal of litigation involving the rights of teachers and

students vis-a-vis boards of education under constitutional and civil rights acts provisions.[43] While the plaintiffs have not won all of the time, they have done so often enough that their rights have been substantially broadened in relation to school boards. For example, the doctrine of in loco parentis has come under serious challenge and students have been acknowledged to have the rights of due process and free expression as citizens in the Gault and Tinker cases. Whereas education was previously considered a privilege, it is now seen as a right.[44] As a consequence, school districts are now required to show cause and provide due process before expelling students from school. Moreover, some time-honored reasons for expulsion (e.g. pregnancy) have been viewed by the courts as no longer valid.

It should also be noted that the courts have been inconsistent in dealing with some questions related to teacher and student compliance with school board directives. The most obvious example is in the area of dress codes and rules regarding hair length for boys. Similarly, the courts have heard many cases dealing with contract nonrenewal of non-tenured teachers and no definitive result is apparent. The consequence of such litigation is to both challenge prerogatives previously attributed to boards and to encourage further legal challenges in these areas.

The courts have also demonstrated willingness to involve themselves with school program matters. A landmark decision in this area was the Hobson vs. Hansen case in which the tracking system in the Washington, D.C. Schools was declared unconstitutional. Other court actions have mandated church-state separations in school affairs whether the issue be prayers in the classroom or state support for sectarian programs.

At the present time, two issues are before the courts which in the view of some observers threaten the continued existence of local school

districts and boards of education. The first of these is the issue of defacto segregation in metropolitan areas. The second is the matter of achieving financial equity among school districts in a given state. While one remedy for the problems presented by the plaintiffs in such cases would be creation of single school districts in the state, such action would be extreme and, in our judgment, unlikely. Nevertheless there are strong indications that the courts will require school districts to alter their practices in these areas and thereby impose still further constraints upon them.

A third set of constraints upon local boards derives from what can be termed the "paralysis of pluralism." While board members are theoretically apolitical and technically agents of the state, they are also residents of the communities they serve. As a consequence, they are often subject to a wide variety of countervailing requests, demands and pressures. Group pressures are most likely to be active in school districts located in metropolitan areas.[45] However, board members also perceive pressures as emanating from individuals. As a result, board members who feel they are to represent the community often find it hard to define the interests of that community. Noting the range of views which may confront them on a given issue and often lacking the political skills to mediate conflicting viewpoints, they may become immobilized on the issue at hand.

One group in particular has become sufficiently strong in recent years that in many districts they warrant separate recognition as a constraint upon school board authority. These are school district employees. In most large school districts and many others as well, teachers and other employees have formed organizations for the purpose of negotiating with boards of education. Even in the absence of enabling statutes, these organizations have been

remarkably effective in influencing school board decision-making. One facet of this influence has been the negotiation of contracts which preempt the major part of the local school budget for teacher interests. A second and increasingly prominent facet has been the introduction of contract provisions which give teachers strong voice in decisions about non-financial aspects of school operation as well. The length of the working day, conditions under which inservice education can go forward, and permission to observe teachers at work in their classrooms are examples.

A third constraining factor is finance, particularly in the large city districts. Inflation, aggressive bargaining, plateauing real estate values, declining levels of federal support, individually and in combination are crippling these districts. Boards have no room to move. They cannot install promising new programs or improve old ones. They can only sit by and watch things grow worse day by day. The confidence gap in many cities is so extended that board members are immobilized. They need dollars to improve the schools to win back public support. The public will not spend more money before there are substantially improved results with the money now available. It has become a stand off with the lives of thousands of youngsters approaching the precipice of personal disaster.

Decision-making Behavior

School board decisions are made by law in formal, public meetings of the board. For the most part, an observer at a board of education meeting would consider these decisions to be highly routinized. While it is not too uncommon for board members to argue publicly about policy alternatives (in one city where school board meetings were televised, they became known as "The Monday Night Fights"), one rarely gets the impression that board

members are actually deliberating about important decisions at these meetings. Instead, it usually appears that members of the board have already done their homework about the issues before them and have convened primarily for the purpose of taking formal action.

School boards (and individual members) utilize several means of preparing to make decisions. Individual board members who advocate special interests often rely on spokesmen for those interests for information and assistance. For example, in one city where school integration was recently a prominent issue, a conservative faction of board members depended heavily upon a former administrator in the school system for advice and direction. Some board members who view their role as being genuinely representative develop a range of contact persons to consult about school matters. Others rely on what their particular circle of friends say. In addition, many board members read widely about education as background for their deliberation. In our own research, we have been impressed with the number of board members who are conscientious about reading in an effort to remain current about educational affairs.

School boards also employ more formal and corporate means to inform themselves for decision-making. A somewhat controversial technique is to employ standing committees of the board. The theory is that these committees will deliberate about matters in their assigned realm (e.g. curriculum, finance, buildings) and bring recommendations for action to the board as a whole. Reservations about this procedure have been expressed by superintendents who feel that such committees are inclined to delve into administrative matters or to merely duplicate effort required of the total board.

A second technique which is usually reserved for dealing with major issues of system-wide significance is to form a citizens' committee to study the matter and make recommendations to the board. Examples of problems which

have been the focal point for such committees include (1) determining where to locate a new school, (2) designating criteria to be used in seeking a new superintendent, and (3) determining whether or not an additional tax levy is required to support the schools. The advantages of this technique are that the board is usually able to get recommendations which have been considered carefully and the board can use the citizens' committee as a legitimating agent with the broader community. Detroit is now testing a new citizens involvement technique. It has appointed a large, representative task force and commissioned it to work with the board on problems of finance, management, and education (teaching and learning). The Education Task Force as it is called will define manageable problems, do intensive work in their regard, and make recommendations continuously to the board. This approach avoids the usual problem of a large set of complex recommendations being delivered to the board at one time which often overwhelms and immobilizes such policy bodies.

A third and common means that boards use to inform themselves is to hold executive sessions or informal study sessions prior to formal meetings of the board. Some states have laws which prohibit such sessions except for certain specified purposes on the theory that public business should be conducted publicly. On the other hand, advocates of such sessions contend that they permit the board to explore controversial positions without upsetting the public unduly. Moreover, they assert that because board members are neither politicians nor professional educators, it is important for them to have the opportunity to disagree and ask frank and perhaps even naive questions outside the public purview.

There has not been a great deal of research done on the decision-making behavior of school boards. The most consistent theme in the research which

is available, however, indicates that boards rely very heavily upon the superintendent of schools for guidance in decision-making. This conclusion has been stated most recently and strongly by Ziegler.[46]

> Lacking an external base of support, committed to the idea of efficiency, unable to compete with the superintendent for information, boards abandon their ideological defensible role of telling the superintendent what various publics want and assume the more submissive role of telling the publics what the superintendent wants.

The Ziegler conclusion is based upon survey research with a national sample of school boards. More detailed case study research in both cities and suburbs has supported the general conclusion that school boards more often provide legitimation for administration initiated policies than they introduce and carry out their own or other lay policy initiatives.[47]

Lacking sophisticated opinion research it is hard to detect trends in board member thinking. It does seem however that, due to intensifying board member frustrations, there are more and more examples of school board members, especially in the suburbs, saying "Let's turn the schools back to the professionals. That's what we pay them for."

While the research supporting it is generally well-done, one should accept this conclusion only with caution. It can be remembered that other researchers cited earlier in this paper have suggested circumstances under which community interests may be more influential with respect to board behavior. Moreover, the fact that boards must legitimate the advice or initiatives of superintendents often helps to shape the nature of that advice. Few superintendents have much enthusiasm for presenting recommendations which are denied by their board. As a consequence, they often shape these recommendations to anticipate the questions and interests of their board.

Problems and Issues Regarding Local Boards

Controversy has existed through history about the most appropriate function and structure for local boards of education. At the turn of the century for example, concern was expressed about reducing the size of boards and doing away with ward or community boards in large cities. This was consistent with the municipal reform movement of the same period.[48] By the mid 1930's substantial debate had developed around proposals to abolish boards of education altogether on the grounds that they were inefficient and interferred with professional management. Thirty years later, boards were criticized for being too distant and removed from the people, and community boards were suggested as a desirable alternative in the cities.

Today, there appears to be little threat to the continued existence of school boards but many of the issues which surrounded these earlier controversies remain. Not the least of these is the tension between board responsiveness to community wishes on the one hand and professional expertise on the other. To be sure, the community and the professionals are not always at odds but important differences can be noted historically. The issue may be seen most clearly with regard to employment concerns. Members of the community have often seen the schools as a source of jobs and urged the hiring of friends and associates upon the board of education. In some instances this progressed to the point that the schools were actually part of the patronage system. On the other hand, the professional ideology held that only the best available professionals should be employed in the schools and the responsibility for employing them should typically rest with the superintendent of schools. Civil Service and tenure legislation were sought by professionals to aid them in avoiding the pressures of responding to "friends" who sought employment or the evils inherent in patronage. The pre Civil Service, tenure, and

certification excesses were reduced or eliminated in most school districts. The return of pressures regarding jobs is marked today. An oversupply of certified teachers, the introduction of paraprofessionals into school employment, and increased amounts of federal monies for special programs not requiring certification are contributing factors.

The demand that school boards represent community interests is very much alive today. The press for community control reflects this sentiment and often includes the specific demand that neighborhood people be allowed to make personnel decisions. Other dramatic manifestations of this demand include recall elections for board members over such issues as desegregation, tax levies, and sex education. Board members in communities of all kinds are often pressed very hard to take positions which represent community views even in the face of court orders, fiscal crises, and expert opinion.

On the other hand, boards of education are also under great pressure to follow the recommendations of their superintendents. Boards employ superintendents to offer such recommendations and the presumption is that boards will generally concur with their superintendents as long as they are their employees. The complexity of school affairs and the jargon as well as the ideology of professional education make it virtually impossible for part-time board members to challenge the recommendations of superintendents on substantive grounds. Thus, some critics share the view stated by Ziegler that "the crisis in American education is produced by the insulation of educational decision-makers from community and client needs and demands, and the consequent inability or unwillingness of schools to adapt themselves to the changing needs of communities and clients"[49] (emphasis in original).

One proposal to help board members deal with both facets of the problem described here is to make board membership full-time paid positions. Thus

board persons would have more time to spend "politicking" with their constituents and more time to study the materials prepared for them by the central administrations of their school systems. An alternative proposal is to provide boards with independent, full-time staff assistance to analyze administrative proposals and recommendations. An assumption which undergirds both proposals is that school governance would be more effective if it provided for a "separation of powers" in which the legislative functions of boards were made more independent of the administrative structure of the system.

School boards have been urged to become more politically responsive. The most prominent suggestion for doing so is the so-called community control proposal seen in major cities. The assumption here is that by electing boards from relatively small neighborhood jurisdictions those board members will be better known by and responsive to their constituents. Another means proposed for increasing board responsiveness is to elect them in partisan contests. Whether or not such structural changes are made in the future, it is likely that board members will face growing pressures to be more responsive. At one level, this will simply mean listening to more citizen concerns on the telephone, attending more citizen meetings and being otherwise available. At another level, this will mean aggressive advocacy for specific citizen interests. Such pressures may limit the attractiveness of holding board office for some potential candidates and make it more attractive for others.

It is also apparent that board members are facing increasingly complicated questions dealing with intergovernmental relationships. One emerging set of relationships is with local municipal officials. Despite the separatist ideology, there are signs that city mayors are becoming more concerned with making of school policy.[50] Similarly, recreation, health and

police officials have more frequent associations with schools. In addition, however, two new types of jurisdictional relationships are emerging in education. The first brought about by decentralization and/or community control is that between citywide and regional boards in major cities. New York and Detroit for example are presently working to reach agreement about the respective powers of city and regional boards. The second new kind of relationship which may emerge is that among districts operating under a central metropolitan education authority. Pending court cases suggest that such relationships may be imposed upon districts.

Finally, it is clear that local boards face issues in a number of areas which are exceedingly complex and growing more so each year. These include matters of local finance, desegregation, student rights, and teacher rights and contract obligations. As noted earlier, boards do not have the power to act unilaterally in such areas. In some instances they have been unable to reach decisions or have acted in ways which prompted judicial review. In many other cases, they have deferred to the recommendations of their superintendents. In our judgment the most critical issue facing local boards in the next decade is whether they will become so immobilized by complexity that they will default completely to the courts and/or the professionals.

Observations About the Future

In preparing this essay we kept before us this simple question: Will local school boards be continued? Our judgment is that they will. Local boards will be retained despite the tough substantive problems they face these days as well as the sensitive issues in local district school governance itself. The reasons are these: (1) there is no organized movement to do away with local boards; (2) the stepped up interest in citizen participation promises

to strengthen rather than lessen public commitment to local decision making; (3) the mounting distrust of big government and remote bureaucratic administrations argue for retaining local control and responsibility for local affairs; and (4) there is an inchoate recognition that the public interest can be served more effectively if there is a legitimized, citizen-managed structure in place to contend with and mediate the growing strength of organized professionals.

Public schools require public control. The United States posture on the citizen role relative to school government has been consistent. A system of education with public support but controlled by teachers and administrators, does not meet the criterion of public control. Despite noble motives of trained educators there is too much at stake in education to leave policy matters solely to professionals.

The question becomes how best to incorporate laymen into the educational governance structure. Legislatures are composed by and large of non-educators. Some argue that the public interest can be adequately served through lay custodianship at the state level only. Proponents maintain that major educational policy questions are settled at that level anyhow. Others believe that the interests of citizens must be given voice and authority at several levels including the neighborhood in decentralized structures. The sentiment in favor of public involvement, allowing for differences in levels and intensity, is so strong that no serious challenge to its continuance is on the horizon. Proposals for full-state funding, decentralization, and metropolitan reorganization must be viewed in this context.

Implications of Increased State Funding for Local Control

Litigation surrounding the Serrano, Rodriguez, and related cases has spurred interest in the possibility of increasing the percentage of school funding which comes from state sources. The purpose would be to bring greater

fiscal equity among districts in a particular state. Perhaps the most prominent proposal of this type was offered by The President's Commission on School Finance: "The Commission recommends that state governments assume responsibility for financing substantially all of the non-federal outlays for public elementary and secondary education, with local supplements permitted up to a level not to exceed 10 percent of the state allocation."[51]

The conventional wisdom holds that such action would inevitably lead to greater state control and thereby further diminish local control and autonomy. The limited amount of evidence available on this point suggests that it is not the case. Mazzoni and Campbell[52] conducted a correlational analysis of the percentage of state school support and state regulation in several areas across the fifty states. They concluded that "there seems to be no consistent relationship between a state's share of public school outlays and the policy direction it exerts in such areas as curriculum, certification, collective bargaining, or evaluation and planning." Their results were consistent with an earlier finding by Levin, et al.,[53] who considered the association between the level of state funding and eleven dimensions of possible state control in ten states. Moreover, the latter study found that "innovation is not stifled by higher percentages of state funding, and indeed may be encouraged by it."[54]

On the basis of the available evidence, it would be inappropriate to conclude that increased levels of state funding would jeopardize local control. It might in fact occur that increased levels of state funding would lessen the fiscal constraints upon local districts and extend their prerogatives for the judicious use of resources.

The Meaning of Decentralization and Community Control

Much of the publicity formerly given to decentralization has waned. However, it is too early to conclude that decentralization which includes a new

layer of boards will or will not work. Early reports appear to be pessimistic, especially those that emanate from academic surroundings.[55] The most heralded successful example is Toronto but it has been in place for twenty years.[56] Perhaps a lesson can be learned from places like Detroit (where it is much too early to judge success or failure) where most support comes from the grass roots. There it appears that everybody distrusts decentralization but the people.

In a few cities, regional or sub-district school boards have been created recently. Again Detroit is an example where eight regional districts were mandated by the State in 1970. Eight regional school boards were also established. There are five elected members on each board; the board chairman is the individual who receives the most votes. The regional chairmen also serve on the central board. The central board has thirteen members, eight of whom are regional chairmen and five of whom are elected at large. The regional board chairmen serve double duty which produces an interesting set of constituency problems and political questions.

Decentralization is often confused with community control. It is not the same. Regional or sub-district boards have only the powers explicitly granted them. Some have more authority than they appear to exercise. Other regional boards appear to be limited in what they can do. They are little more than advisory bodies and not even that in cases where central board members resent regional board existence. Community control means that the boards closest to the people are in charge--at least as much as is allowable within a state's system of educational governance. Decentralization does not give the large city district any more rights or privileges than the district had prior to such change. It does mean sharing of power within a large district. Or at least that is the theory.

Apparently some decentralizations are little more than paper declarations.

Central board members resist, even resent, sharing governance with regional or sub-district boards. If decentralization patterns, which include another layer of boards, do not include detailed allocations of power, authority, and responsibility between the two levels, the system is not going to work. Uncertainty breeds competitiveness between the layers. Details have to be clear; it is essential for board members and for administrators.

The short run future of decentralization and community control is difficult to predict. The adoption of decentralization patterns of administrative organization seems to be slowing. There has not been any lasting example of community control despite strong efforts in New York City and Chicago. The conditions that produced the original interest in decentralization and community control remain however and indicate that the search for ways to respond to such conditions will continue. The uncertainty of court decisions relative to metropolitan forms of desegregation tends to discourage the development of new patterns of local school government until a pattern of court actions on desegregation has emerged.

Meaning of Metropolitan Forms of School Government

Metropolitan school governments and regional school governments are in reality forms of decentralization. They are addressed to metropolitan and regional area relationships to state government. Earlier a reference was made to the fact that these new forms of school government altered the responsibilities of large city school board members. The sharing of functions in such situations flows upward and downward, if there are regional boards beneath.

The central board member of a large district that must relate to regional board members below him in the hierarchy and to metropolitan district board members above him performs in a radically modified system of local school government. Board members perceive themselves to be in a paradoxical situation,

especially if the responsibilities of each layer are not clearly delineated. Board members sense that their authority is being sucked away from above and below simultaneously. The consequence is a sense of powerlessness. If a metropolitan government is formed and expected to effect a comprehensive integration plan, the responsibilities of each layer in that regard will have to be explicitly spelled out. For example, in a court ordered plan to bus students across sub-district lines who is responsible for implementation? Do metropolitan level administrative decisions, not spelled out in statute or precedent, supersede decisions at the district level? What procedures exist to mediate matters at issue? Substantial planning must precede the adoption of metropolitan educational governments.

We began this essay with reference to the ideology of school government in the United States, traced its historical origins briefly, and commented regarding some of the contemporary concerns and challenges to current school boards. In the 1960's and continuing to the present the performance of school boards was under severe criticism but the basic function of local boards was not disturbed. We expect performance to continue to be under intense public scrutiny but we don't anticipate a move to discontinue local boards.

Footnotes

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10 John N. Greer, The History of Education in Minnesota, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 15.

11 Campbell, Cunningham, McPhee, and Nystrand, op. cit., chap. 4.

12 Gilland, op. cit., pp. 271-72.

13 We use the term ideology in a general way. Webster's Third New International Dictionary includes as one meaning of ideology "the integrated assertions, theories, and aims that constitute a socio-political program." We do not intend its interpretation to be extremist, i.e., representative of values that might be right or left, but rather a neutral term representative of an accepted description of public school government. Meranto attributes to the school of government ideology four doctrines of separatism, no-politics, professionalism, and no-conflict. Philip J. Meranto, School Politics in the Metropolis (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 4-14. Also see Thomas W. Eliot, "Toward an Understanding of Public School Politics," American Political Science Review, LII (December 1959), pp. 1032-51.

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